

MARINE SAFETY BULLETIN

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SMALL BOAT ATTACKS AGAINST MARITIME INTERESTS

Although the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has no specific information indicating an imminent attack against maritime targets, terrorist organizations--most notably Al-Qaeda--have demonstrated the intent and operational capability to conduct attacks against high-profile maritime targets. This bulletin is designed to sensitize readers to the particular threat of the use of small boats as an attack method and to recognize the implementation of specific protective measures that may help mitigate against the threat.

DETAILS

Maritime Attack Methods

Maritime attacks by terrorist organizations have involved the use of suicide operatives attacking either civilian or military maritime platforms with small boats laden with explosives. Small boats offer terrorists a flexible operational capability because they can blend in with other boats, require limited infrastructure, and provide cover for suspicious activities. Al-Qaeda has demonstrated the capability to attack large-scale, high profile vessels, such as the October 2000, U.S.S. Cole (U.S. Navy destroyer) and October 2002, M/V Limburgh (French oil tanker). While military vessels present more difficult targets due to their on-board armaments and early-warning systems, they are high risk because of their symbolic value. Al-Qaeda has also discussed targeting civilian vessels, such as cruise ships and ferries, which possess fewer security measures and are easier to strike.

MARITIME PROTECTIVE MEASURES

- Ensure an open line of communication with appropriate law enforcement authorities while in port, and report any suspicious activities.
 - Muster and brief your fire and emergency parties when encountering high threat conditions.
 - Owners of boat rental shops should be sensitive to unusual activities or inquiries from suspicious individuals regarding equipment.
- Keep watertight doors and fire screen doors closed to minimize the spread of a fire or flooding due to an attack.
 - Report attacks immediately to the nearest Rescue Coordination Center (Coast Guard unit in the United States) and display distress signals.
- Provide a vigilant bridge watch while underway, at anchor, or moored.
 - Activate your radar system to augment your bridge watch. Watchstanders should pay particular attention to blind spots.
 - Provide an additional watch stander on the stern. Watchstanders should be in radio contact with the bridge.

- Provide low light binoculars for the bridge watch and lookouts.
- Wide beam floodlights should be kept ready to probe for suspected craft.
- For a potential terrorist target, identify the likely approach of attack.
 - Ensure your high pressure fire fighting system is charged and activate it over the side to deter small boats from approaching.
 - Be careful not to put all lookout efforts on a suspect craft since a secondary craft may be the terrorist platform.
 - When underway in unconfined waters, attempt to out-maneuver and evade the suspicious vessel approaching.
- When in port or at anchor consider lowering small boats to patrol around the vessel and, by their presence, to deter, detect and as necessary report suspicious vessels and activities.
 - When moored or anchored in the vicinity of other vessels coordinate lookout, patrol, and other security activities to act as a force multiplier.
 - Arrange proper illumination of all decks and the water surface in vicinity of the vessel when the vessel is moored at night.
 - If available, deploy a surface physical barrier system, e.g., oil containment boom, around your vessel to prevent small boats from getting alongside.

For additional information regarding maritime threats please refer to the DHS information bulletins dated August 01, 2003 entitled Potential Threats to Ferry Boats: Possible Surveillance or Pre-Operational Planning and August 22, 2003 entitled Swimmer Attack Indicators and Protective Measures.

DHS intends to update this Advisory should it receive additional relevant information, including information provided to it by the user community. Based on this notification, no change to the Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS) level is anticipated; the current HSAS level is YELLOW.

All recipients of this bulletin are encouraged to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity to local law enforcement and the Marine Safety Office at (504) 589-6261 or the National Response center via the 24-hour telephone number at 1-800-424-8802.

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